DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 817 JC 860 097

AUTHOR Terrey, John N.
TITLE Community Colleges on the Chopping Block.
INSTITUTION Washington State Board for Community Coll. Education, Olympia.
PUB DATE 23 Jan 86
NOTE 8p.; Memorandum to State Board Members. For a related document, see JC 850 098.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; College Role; *Community Colleges; Educational Quality; *Financial Policy; Financial Support; *Retrenchment; State Aid; *Statewide Planning; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Washington

ABSTRACT

In 1971, Washington was identified as one of the seven pacesetter states in the community college movement. Today, Washington ranks 48th nationwide in terms of state support for community colleges, with little hope that the economic situation will improve given the present tax structure. As a consequence, the lack of economic growth in the state is literally establishing the mission for the community colleges of the future. Much of the present debate focuses on who should be educated, who should pay for this education, and how much should they pay. Currently, there is a revolt against the egalitarian spirit which gave rise to the community college in favor of a return to the elitist spirit of earlier days. Exemplifying this spirit is a report by the Business Roundtable which proposes that funding improvements from 1987 to 1991 be directed toward the University of Washington, while maintaining the current level of funding for community colleges. The principal weaknesses in this proposal are that the consequences of its recommendations have not been thoroughly examined; it does not consider that the mission of the community college is different from that of the university; and it recommends that remediation and literacy become community college responsibilities without recommending that these tasks receive adequate funding. In addition, the Roundtable report does not explain what roles and missions of the community colleges are to be reduced or eliminated in order to restore quality to the research universities, including such concerns as transfer education, vocational and technical education, worker retraining programs, small business programs, and customized job training. As each of these programs is essential to any state promoting economic development, it seems unlikely that any would be reduced or abolished. It is equally important, however, that access and opportunity be maintained. Educational leaders will not be exercising their responsibilities by reducing educational opportunity in a time of national and state need. (EJV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. TERREY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

DR. JOHN N. TERREY
Executive Director

ED266817

STATE OF WASHINGTON

STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

319 Seventh Avenue, FF-11 • Olympia, Washington 98504-3111 • (206) 753-2000 • (SCAN) 234-2000

IC 860 097

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members, State Board

FROM: John N. Terrey

DATE: January 23, 1986

SUBJECT: Community Colleges on the Chopping Block

Community colleges today are in trouble--dire trouble. The principal cause of the trouble is the lack of funding, but the lack of funding has given rise to questions about some of the most cherished beliefs set forth in the community college philosophy.

In 1985 Clark Kerr, the premier philosopher and conscience of higher education, wrote:

> The two great innovations in higher education in the United States have been the land-grant movement of the nineteenth century and the community college movement of the twentieth century.[1]

In 1967 the Legislature enacted the Community College Act which contained the most eloquent statement in proclaiming the open door to be found in statute any place in the United States.

In 1971 the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education identified Washington as one of the seven pacesetter states in the community college movement.[2]

Opportunity was extended until more than one-half of all the students enrolled in higher education were enrolled in community colleges. Funding to support the egalitarian concept of educational opportunity for all was available. When the funding crisis came in 1980, enrollments were forced down and the philosophical arguments began. Success is fleeting and fragile.

Today, as one newspaper editor wrote recently, community colleges are on the chopping block. The open door philosophy, the very centerpiece of the historic 1967 legislation, no longer exists. Instead, there is a mandated enrollment lid which has restricted access. Enrollments, due to funding cuts, have declined from 101,000 full-time equivalent students in 1981 to 83,300 in 1985-86. The lack of funding is the culprit. When inflation is factored in, the appropriation for community colleges for the current biennium (1985-87) represents an actual decline in the financial support for community colleges. In fact, all of higher education in the state has suffered. While state support for higher education last year increased 19 percent nationally, in Washington it increased 5 percent. Washington ranked forty-eighth among the fifty states in this respect. When one looks at the increase in state support over the last decade, the results are the same. Washington ranks forty-eighth nationally. The funding problem is both long and deep. Despite massive shifts in funding from the state to the student by means of tuition increases, the funding crisis has deepened.

In 1973-75 higher education accounted for 22.3 percent of the state general fund even though tuition rates were comparatively low and tuition collections were retained at the college level. In 1985-87 with tuition rates much higher and with tuition going to the general fund, higher education dropped to 16.1 percent of the general fund. In the meantime, enrollments for community colleges increased by 9,243 full-time students from 1973 to 1985.

All higher education suffered financially. Quality declined. But when the workload--the enrollment changes--are examined, the results reveal that the appropriations per student place community colleges in thirtieth place among the fifty states at $2,279 per student, $289 per student below the national average.

For public four-year institutions, Washington ranks twelfth in cost per student, at $4,944 or $500 above the national average. While none of higher education fared well, the community colleges fared the least well.

The accolades of the '60s and the '70s have become the taunts of the '80s. The role and mission have been questioned. Some have cried for reducing quantity to preserve quality. And, within higher education itself, the coup de grace is the argument that the state is appropriating enough money for higher education but not distributing it properly. The Business Roundtable has dignified this specious argument by lending its prestige in a preliminary report which has been discussed widely throughout the state. The principal thrust of the report as it relates to community colleges is that funding improvements from 1987 to 1991 should be directed to the two research universities--primarily the University of Washington. Funding for community colleges would be held to current levels.

This is a damaging and shortsighted proposal which will do real and lasting damage in the state in a critical period.

In a new book Frank Newman of the Education Commission of the states relates the funding issue to the survival of business and the survival of the nation. He observes that American higher education is the best in the world, but he goes on to warn that:

> ...American higher education must be even more effective if it is to meet the needs of the country in the decade ahead. New and powerful forces are shaping American society, increasing and changing the demands placed upon higher education.
>
> At stake is more than simply the issue of the health of the American economy. At stake is the fundamental issue of the place of the United States in the world, whether it will define itself as a country moving ahead or as a country drifting into a lesser role. We believe that the United States is gearing up for an economic renewal. Education at all levels is expected to play a major role.[3]

For its very survival amid serious challenges from all quarters in an "interrelated" world, business must be stronger than it is. Business as a matter of self-interest cannot afford to do anything other than to join education by investing in human development. To oppose the investment in education is shortsighted, foolish, and fatal.

Many of the current criticisms of the community colleges would not be serious if the present funding crisis were not both deep and prolonged. The roles of the community colleges have changed over time, are changing, and will continue to change. As William James patiently reminded his readers, we live in an unfinished universe. Its ability to change has been one of the primary strengths of the community college.

Since 1901 when the first community college (junior college) opened its doors, the movement has gone through four clearly identified generations and is seeking to clarify the focus for the emerging new realities. The four generations were:

Generation 1: Extension of High School (1901-1930)
Generation 2: Junior College (1930-1950)
Generation 3: Community College (1950-1970)
Generation 4: Comprehensive Community College (1970-1985)

The forces which have shaped the development are three: (1) the rapid industrialization of the nation, (2) the democratization of public education, and (3) the rise of the research universities. Not only was William Rainey Harper the "father" of the community college, but he was also the founding president of the University of Chicago--a research

university with primary interest in graduate education and research. In this state, Charles Odegaard proudly promoted the development of community colleges from his position as president of the University of Washington--another major research university. Community colleges have made it possible for research universities to develop. Surely there is a mild touch of irony when the events of today are examined from an historical perspective. The research universities which have done so much to promote the development of community colleges are now seeking to restrict and reduce the institutions they helped to create.

What about the Fifth Generation of community colleges? Breneman and Nelson in 1981 identified the "tension between the mission and finance." They thoughtfully wrote:

> The tension between the mission and finance of community colleges reflects many of the fundamental problems of today's economy: the facts of scarcity, the need for trade-off, the limits of government, the costs of inefficiences, and the conflicts between the haves and the have-nots when the economic pie is not growing.[4] (Emphasis added.)

While recognizing the prophetic insights of their writings, the factual conclusion is that the economic pie in Washington is not growing and unfortunately is not likely to grow significantly under the present tax structure which generates revenue on an unpredictable and inconsistent pattern. As a consequence--at this moment--the lack of growth of the economic pie is literally establishing the mission for community colleges in the Fifth Generation. It is obvious that the major research university and the Business Rountable have formed a marriage of the "haves" while the community colleges are united with the voiceless "have-nots."

Much of the present debate comes down to the questions of who should be educated, who should pay, and how much should they pay? One thing which set the comprehensive community college (the Fourth Generation) apart from the other earlier generations is the participation of previously underserved groups--women, ethnic minorities, physically handicapped, displaced workers, and learners of English-as-a-Second-Language. The brutal truth is that the present finite pie does not include the necessary revenue to sustain the educational services to these groups.

There is presently a revolt against the egalitarian spirit which gave rise to the community college from 1950 to 1975. There is also a return to the elitist spirit of earlier days when educational opportunity was a social and economic privilege. Clearly, intended or not, there is in the preliminary Roundtable report a tone of elitism as well as a concern about keeping public expenditures limited. One must conclude that the recommendation to limit community college expenditures to current levels while the expenditures for the research universities are increased is a clear negation of the principle of equal educational opportunity for all.

The Newman Report referred to earlier--Higher Education and the American Resurgence--states that

> ...concern for access must include concern for outcomes as well. Both economic development and civic integration require the full participation of more than just an elite, particularly just a white elite. The enduring and honorable American tradition of opportunity through education must function for the whole of the population.[5]

The principal weakness in the Roundtable report is that its recommendations have not been thoroughly examined for consequences. Beyond challenge, this state needs excellent research universities. Beyond challenge, the two research universities are suffering in terms of quality from a lack of financial support. Beyond challenge, their quality has been slipping since 1980. However, so have quality and opportunity been slipping in the community college system.

The report in its present form does not specify where the additional money for the research universities would be used other than to improve quality. Are the specific improvements in quality a trade-off so powerful as to warrant the denial of educational opportunity to other students? This decision has serious social, human, and economic consequences.

One of the products of a research university is research--research which improves the quality of life, which reduces ignorance, disease and poverty. But all the research requires people in businesses or public services to apply the findings. These people applying the fruits of the research likewise need education and training. It is not pure research that has made Boeing a central force in the aerospace industry. Education is needed at all levels, from the bottom to the top, from the idea to the production.

Community colleges are not research universities writ small. They are different institutions with different roles and missions. The fact is that both types of institutions are needed. It is as foolish to recommend that the research universities are paramount as it would be to argue the community colleges are paramount. Both are integral parts of a unified whole.

What the Roundtable does not explain is what roles and missions of the community colleges are to be reduced or eliminated so as to free up the dollars needed to restore quality to the research universities. Would the Roundtable recommend reducing the transfer function of the community college? This would be unwise. The transfer function is the oldest, the original function of the community college. Its faculty do a superb job of teaching. In fact, as an efficiency measure, should consideration be given to transferring all lower division instruction from the research universities to the community colleges? This would be less expensive to

the student and less costly to the state. Overall it would provide better teaching. (This is not a revolutionary idea. The founding president at the University of Chicago and his colleagues at research universities were making this recommendation at the turn of the century.)

Does the Roundtable seriously propose reducing the vocational and technical programs or curtailing their enrollments? The very industries whose chief executive officers comprise the membership of the Roundtable need the students from these programs to make their cash registers sing. Even for the short-term, the reduction in the production of a skilled workforce would be folly for these companies.

Does the Roundtable seriously propose reducing the programs for the retraining of their workers? Change is rapid. The retraining of workers is essential to keeping industries vital so that they can meet the serious economic challenge from other nations. The competition is becoming keener every year. Today more than 70 percent of U.S. manufactured goods are facing import competition. In 1965 only 25 percent faced foreign competition.

Does the Roundtable seriously propose that community colleges delete their programs for small business or for customized job training?

Upon reflection it appears unlikely that any of these programs would be reduced or abolished. They are essential to business. They are essential to any state seeking to promote economic development. An educated elite alone will not successfully meet the global competitive challenge.

John W. Gardner in the revised edition of Excellence concludes:

> The importance of education is not limited to the higher orders of talent. A complex society is dependent every hour of every day upon the capacity of its people at every level to read and write, to make difficult judgments, and to act in the light of extensive information....[6]

The Roundtable does recommend that remediation and literacy become community college responsibilities. But the Roundtable is unrealistic in not recommending that the funding to do these tasks be provided. Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, spoke the bitter truth when said: "It is ironic that those who need the most help get the least."[7]

The student/faculty ratio in remedial classes is currently 33 to 1. This is certainly too high to produce effective results. There are more than 250,000 adults in this state who are functionally illiterate. Simply changing internal priorities as suggested by the Roundtable is not possible. The need is too great. The number of functional illiterates exceeds the total number of people in public higher education. Through the programs of Adult Basic Education only about 6 to 7 percent of the need is being met. Yet there is no recommendation for funding to meet those growing needs.

The answer may not be easy, but it is simple. Two hundred years ago John Adams wrote to a friend: "The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people, and must be willing to bear the expense of it."[8]

The open door to community colleges must remain open. Education is opportunity. And opportunity must remain available to all who are willing to work to attain the standards of quality. Learning should be fun but not necessarily easy. High standards need to be preserved, and the faculty must assist the students in meeting the standards. For no reason and for no student should the standards be lowered. Education in the community colleges should be a helping process, not a sorting process. The real measure is how many complete, not how many fail.

History is on the side of the community colleges. Theodore H. White in his book of personal adventure observed that "America was that unique country whose political faith could be summed up as Opportunity."[9] Again, he as others thoughtfully conclude that education is opportunity. He notes that as a nation America's heroes have been those leaders who enlarged opportunity. Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln are two leaders who in dark and trying hours wrote bright chapters of hope by enlarging opportunity. The leaders of the Business Roundtable will not be exercising their leadership responsibilities by reducing educational opportunity in a time of national and state need. Community colleges--the people's colleges--should be spared the chopping block.

FOOTNOTES

[1]William L. Deegan and Dale Tillery. Reviewing the American Community College. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1985), p. vii.

[2]Leland L. Medsker and Dale Tillery. Breaking the Access Barrier. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), p. 26.

[3]Frank Newman, Higher Education and the American Resurgence (Princeton, New Jersey: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1985), pp. xiii-xiv.

[4]David W. Breneman and Susan C. Nelson, Financing Community Colleges: An Economic Perspective (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1981), p.39.

[5]Newman, Ibid. p. xvi.

[6]John W. Gardner, Excellence: Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too? Revised Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p.53.

[7]Ernest Boyer, High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 134.

[8]John Adams, letter to John Stebb, September 10, 1775.

[9]Theodore H. White, In Search of History (New York: Warner Brooks, Inc., (1978), p. 527.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
APR 4 1986